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Key actor in the great events of our time

Swords and Plowshares

By Maxwell D. Taylor
General, U. S. Army (Retired).
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Reviewed by STEPHEN E. AMBROSE

There is scarcely a man alive who has been more intimately associated with the cold war than General Maxwell D. Taylor. He was the U.S. commander in Berlin during the Truman administration, commander of the Eighth Army in Korea for the later stages of the conflict there, Chief of Staff of the Army during the Eisenhower administration, a special consultant for Kennedy on the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy's personal adviser on military affairs, and finally Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Kennedy. Taylor served President Johnson in a variety of positions, for a year as ambassador to Vietnam and the rest of the time as an adviser on Vietnamese affairs. He has held these positions because he has earned the respect and trust of four presidents; because he has held the positions there is hardly a cold war crisis in which he has not been deeply involved.

Viewed from the perspective of the White House, Taylor was a godsend: tireless, extremely intelligent and articulate, a storehouse of fresh ideas to solve old problems, able to present firm recommendations and to supervise their implementation. Others have seen Taylor differently—his critics point to his advocacy of limited war and his insistence on building such units as the Green Berets as instrumental in getting us into Vietnam. Taylor, according to the critics, always urges the use of force, sees only military solutions to political problems, and could be dismissed as a hopeless cold warrior if only he had not held so much power and used it so disastrously.

Both the pro- and anti-Taylor groups will find support for their positions in the general's memoirs, which, not incidently, are of a superior literary quality, far surpassing the usual old soldier's tales. Taylor tells the whole story of his life, beginning in the public schools of Kansas City, continuing through West Point, tours in the Far East, World War II, and on into the cold war. He was an authentic hero in the big war; in 1943 he went alone into German-held Rome on the eve of the invasion of Italy to try to work out a deal with the Italians and, in 1944, was one of the first Americans to airdrop into France on D-Day, where he served as commander of the famous 101st Airborne. After the war he was superintendent of West Point before moving on to Berlin.

Taylor's preparation for the highest levels of government, in short, was well-nigh perfect. An accomplished linguist, he worked on a daily basis with most of the free world's leaders and traveled widely. He had first-hand knowledge of the trouble spots and of the military potential of the United States; thus he knew which pegs to put into which holes. He meshed beautifully with the Kennedy team of young, dynamic intellectuals eager to save the world by getting tough with Russia, China, and their allies. Kennedy himself had been greatly impressed by Taylor's 1960 book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, calling it "most persuasive," and along with Secretary of Defense McNamara set about to build the conventional forces that would make Taylor's strategy of flexible response feasible. Kennedy gave Taylor a wide variety of important assignments, but the one that counted in the end was to advise the president on what to do about Vietnam.

Taylor's advice, then and now, was to do whatever had to be done to save the country, i.e., to prevent a Viet Cong victory. Thanks to flexible response, Kennedy had built the units to do the job (or so he and Taylor thought). Taylor did warn Kennedy on the possible dangers of introducing American troops to Vietnam. Before taking the first step, Taylor declared, the "U.S. government should deliberately and thoughtfully decide whether or not it committed itself without reservation to preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism and, if so, whether it was ready to pay whatever price that commitment might entail." He warned that as many as six divisions might ultimately be required. The military made certain, in other words, that Kennedy knew what he was getting into in Vietnam; this would seem to be sufficient answer to those who claim that Jack Kennedy never would have escalated the war as Johnson did.

The warning never even slowed down the Kennedy administration; as Taylor reports, McNamara "was off the starting blocks like a shot as soon as he received the go-ahead from President Kennedy." Over the next decade Taylor spent most of his time either visiting Vietnam on investigating trips or else making recommendations about what to do there. In general, his advice was to step up the level of fighting in order to force Hanoi to call off the war. He stuck with Johnson to the bitter end; in Taylor's view

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